

Replace Yourself

Ask yourself this question, “**How am I intentionally investing in a potential leader in my group?**” If no answer comes to mind you need to pay special attention to one of the eight leader essentials, Replace Yourself. It’s a leader essential that may never feel urgent, but it’s always important.

Replace Yourself challenges you to prepare others for leadership by passing along knowledge and skills about leading a group as well as the opportunity to put that knowledge and those skills to practice in your group. It’s tempting to neglect the opportunity to identify and develop an apprentice because it is hard to know where to begin and it seems like a lot of extra work on top of your responsibilities of leading and guiding your group. But, developing future leaders is an important part of leading well. In fact, it’s essential that all good leaders make new leaders. All good leaders replace themselves.

So where do you start? Replacing yourself usually begins with one of the other eight leader essentials Promote Participation. As you delegate tasks to your group members in order to give them a sense of ownership over the group, you will begin to see who might have the passion, confidence, and spiritual maturity to become an apprentice. Talk to that person. Invite him or her into leadership. From there, you simply continue to model what it looks like to lead a group by leading your group well. Provide your apprentice with support and feedback. Eventually you’ll move beyond sharing tasks with that person to sharing responsibilities.

At first, you may ask that person to take on some of the larger tasks. Like facilitating group discussions or communicating to the group through email, text, or phone calls. But eventually you’ll invite your apprentice to help you carry out a group leader’s two biggest responsibilities:

- 1. Encouraging the spiritual growth of every member of the group.**
- 2. Create an environment in which every group member has the opportunity to take next step in their faith.**

You don't have to be an expert leader to apprentice someone. You just have to be willing to be intentional, to have some conversations, and to allow your apprentice to share in leading the group. Replacing yourself is less about training someone else than it is modeling behavior and allowing that person to take on more and more leadership responsibilities while knowing that there is a safety net. After all, you are the group's leader. In case you're not convinced yet here are three reasons apprenticing is important:

First, it's biblical. Moses apprenticed Joshua. Elijah apprenticed Elisha. Paul apprenticed Timothy. But the clearest example of apprenticing is Jesus and his disciples. If anyone could have done ministry on its own it was Jesus. But he didn't, his disciples were always with him. Watching, listening, and learning. He involved them in a lot of what he did and occasionally explained why he did the things he did. That's because he knew he would eventually hand his ministry off to them.

Second, it's practical. Apprenticing doesn't just develop the apprentice, it develops you. Nothing helps you take stock of what you know like being asked to show someone else. And as you hand over responsibility to your apprentices they bring their knowledge, talent, and experience to bear upon what you shared with them. They find new and better ways to lead and this gives you the opportunity to learn from them.

Finally, it's strategic. If our mission is to lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ and if groups are the best environment we know for people to grow then we need group leaders. And those who have been apprenticed make the best leaders. When this group ends we hoped you have trained an apprentice who is ready to lead a group. That way, this

current group can multiply into two groups that are ready to add members who are new to community.

So how do you know who in your group might make a great apprentice? Keep in mind you're not trying to find someone who will be ready to lead a group tomorrow. You're looking for someone who is humble, teachable, curious, and intentional. A person with those qualities. Someone who thinks of others first, is eager to learn, and is more prone to asking questions than offering quick opinions. This person should have the kind of spiritual maturity necessary for good leadership.